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Atari Online News, Etc.
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->From the Editor's Keyboard
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"Saying it like it is!"

Right off the bat, I'm going to apologize - last week's positive attitude fizzled out quickly! It started with another round of snow last weekend. Yes, we just moved up a few more notches in the record books. Over seven feet of snow so far this winter season; I can't take any more. The calendar says Spring arrives this weekend. Ha! There's still a couple of feet of snow in my yard. The only positive to all of this is that the amount of daylight has increased, with later sunsets. I need spring-like weather, now!

My attitude has also taken a nose-dive due to work. In the past, I've always managed to be able to put up with the politics, the favoritism, and the pettiness that usually rears up often in larger organizations. But, eventually, it takes its toll. I just have to wonder if it's all worth it sometimes. I've "paid my dues" over the years, but the price never seems to level off. I even looked into my pension, but discovered I'm still a little over a year away from being able to take early retirement. So now I'm pondering what I want to do. Stick around until retirement age, take something else in the organization, but likely a major step downward, or leave altogether hoping to find something better - i.e. less stressful. It's not an easy decision.

On a positive note, I got an unexpected enjoyable e-mail earlier in the week from a friend of mine from college. He mentioned that "a few of the guys" and their wives were getting together in a couple of months, inviting my wife and I to join them. I doubt that I can make the trip to Philadelphia since it's quite a way to go, but it was nice to hear from him; it's been almost 30 years since I graduated (wow!). I've spoken with him a few times over the years, but it's been quite awhile. The e-mail brought back a lot of great college memories, though. Family and friends, that's what it's all about in the end.

Until next time...

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Stop the worries, stop the fears, a new version of HighWire is now here.
Or in other words HighWire 0.2.5 is now available to the public.

All of those long winter evenings weren't wasted. Quite a number of improvements have been made to the program. Among those are...

- * CSS parser improved for better compatibility
 - New Keywords implemented
 - o height
 - o float
 - o clear
 - o border
 - o font
 - o min-width
 - o size values enabled for tables
- * Rendering improved for floating block elements (eg. DIV, TABLE, P...)
- * NOWRAP bugfix
- * Several improvements for Table layout
- * Link Handling reworked and improved
- * Colour logo added for start window and icons as well as a separate RSC file for the desktop
- * A few continuous loop lockup bugs eliminated
- * better handling of Script and Style tags
- * Plus Several more (but less obvious) bugs fixed.

What does this all mean. Well you can expect many sites to look quite a bit better. The program itself is less susceptible to poorly written html locking it up and at least a few of the annoying bugs with link, script and style tags are now gone. We think you will find it worth the wait.

To download and read more, visit us at:

<http://highwire.atari-users.net>

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. This week's column is going to be a short one. A lot of things have conspired to cut short my free time this week, and I'm feeling the pinch.

Let's get right to the stuff from the UseNet, shall we? Yeah, I thought you'd appreciate not having to read too much of my babbling this time.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup
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Mark Duckworth pops in to tell us about one of my favorite programs in both WinDOZE and Linux: VNC. VNC stands for Virtual Network Computing. Using this program, you can basically control another computer on the network like your monitor and keyboard were ITS monitor and keyboard. It's really, really cool. Mark tells us:

"A small step, I got vnc working using the GEM x server and using the XGetImg call. Kind of a proof of concept, shows that things are pretty slow, even on my 80MHz 060... slow or not it's useable though and quite interesting to display my falcon on my linux box. I'm sure once I'm polling memory natively or using vdi (hopefully it's possible) things should be MUCH faster. I also have to figure out how to inject keyboard and mouse input.. THAT I don't think will be too hard.

Anyway, without further ado.. Here's the neat stuff :)

http://www.atari-source.org/atari_vnc.png "

Adam Klobukowski tells Mark:

"Great stuff!

You'll need to hook to VDI vectors so it could work on any machine. Maybe try asking Ozk so he could provide some 'legal' way to do it in 0Vdi? "

Coda adds:

"That's pretty neat. It could be useful for doing cross-development work."

Bill Freeman asks about a Sony floppy drive:

"On a Sony MPF920 floppy drive, there is a switch next to, and mechanically linked to, the eject button labeled "SW3".

Is that what needs to be bridged for "disk detect" to work properly on an ST?

This information is not is not contained in
ftp://gem.win.co.nz/hall/hardware/sony_144.zip
If it is, I don't see it there."

Hallvard Tangeraas tells Bill:

"It's been a while since I worked with this and I can't remember all the details, but looking at the "sony_144.gif" or "sony_144.img" illustration jogs my memory.

On the right hand side you'll see that part of the circuit board where the switches are. This is the circuit board seen from underneath the drive, with the eject button/disk-insert side on top.

From the left hand side the first switch (WRPT) is the write-protect switch. Then there's the disk-detect switch (CTIN) which should be

shorted. Finally, on the right hand side you have the HD/DD detect switch (HDIN). Compare the switches with a high-density floppy disk and you'll easily see where the write-protect and the HD/DD switches go.

This is for the Sony MPF 520-1, but I can't imagine other drives being very different.

The drive will work fine without shorting/bridging the disk-detect switch, but like I experienced with some test-disks of mine, you can end up with the computer not "knowing" that a floppy disk has been removed, and another one inserted.

Be sure to try it all out with different floppies that are *copies* unless you really want to lose your valuable data ;-)

Again, I can't remember the exact details here, but I think that I verified the fact that the computer didn't recognize a disk-change by seeing what happened when I pressed the ESC key to re-read the current disk content after a disk-change. I believe that I exchanged a disk with another one, pressed ESC, but the drive *didn't* re-read the disk as it should, simply because the computer wasn't told that a new disk had been inserted. So if this happens you could very well get some seriously messed up floppies. Try it with some test disks.

Shorting the "CTIN" (disk detect) switch solved this problem as it re-reads the current floppy disk every time ESC is pressed.

Correct me if this doesn't make sense, someone; this is all from memory."

'Jorge' tells Hallvard:

"It does make sense.

TOS doesn't use the hardware change-line signal that PC drives have. Instead it polls the drives at the VBL checking if the write protect signal changed. The idea is that (hopefully) the VBL will detect the forced changes *while* you are inserting/removing the disk.

The above procedure works fine (more or less) with Atari drives. But if the drive uses the change-line protocol, it will fail. So you must disable it, older PC drives had a jumper, newer ones are of course, jumper-less."

Sam F. asks about Timeworks Publisher:

"I plan on ordering Timeworks Publisher ST 2, mainly because of nostalgia, I used non 2 version back when I had a 1040st and absolutely loved it!

Anywho, what I'd like to know is have any of you used it? Is it compatible with SpeedoGDOS and/or NVDI?"

Mike Kerslake tells Sam:

"There was a special disk which the guy behind Atari World put together which allowed Timeworks ST2 to run with SpeedoGDOS. I bought it, played around with it and got it working to a degree. Usual problem was that

after printing a page or set of pages it would crash with a couple of bombs and you needed a reboot to carry on. In the end I used a combination of non SpeedoGDOS Timeworks and Calamus 1.09 to do a magazine rather than put up with the hassle.

Eventually I progressed onto Papyrus and the results of my time with that program are well illustrated in Atari Computing magazine, as in the fact that nearly the whole of the issues from 7 onwards were done with Papyrus.

Considering it was a WP program rather than a DTP program, it was pretty easy to do quite complex layouts. I even found a way which was never documented on altering the flow of master page elements, and I know one of the people behind at ROM was surprised at what I had been able to do with their program. They never, unfortunately, ever sent us a later version of the program so I stuck with version 5 IIRC!

Print output from NVDI coupled to a 600dpi Laserjet 4 was superb and as we provided camera ready copy for our printers, it had to be good, The quality of the halftones was very very good and the printers reckoned it was best CRC they had seen, and much better than the PC program output which we used for the first few issues."

Derryck Croker adds:

"You should also be asking if it's compatible with your CT60 if you plan on using it on that!"

Peter West tells Sam:

"Yes it is [compatible with Speedo]. BUT!!!! It is extremely slooooooooooow in printing - so set it off and go to dinner!"

Hallvard Tangeraas asks about hard drive stuff:

"It's been a while so it's slipped my mind....
how large can hard drive partitions be under TOS 2.06?
Isn't there a limit to how big the actual drive can be as well, or is it just a matter of not being able to use all the storage space of a big drive?

Secondly, is it possible to buy "small" (by today's standards) SCSI hard drives these days? I've done fine with a 540 Mbyte drive for years, so I suppose somewhere between that and 1 GB would be more than enough. And most importantly: the drive has to be *very* quiet -actually close to completely silent if possible. Any drives which can be recommended?

I'll be using the Link 97 along with HDdriver."

Uwe Seimet tells Hallvard:

"512 MB [is the largest partition size].

With your Link97 there is no size limit for the drive.

If a silent drive is very important for you consider adding an IDE

interface to your Atari and then using a CF card as your drive. This may also work for SCSI, but I don't know the price for SCSI CF adapters. Note, however, that CF cards are usually slower than real hard drives."

Hallvard tells Uwe:

"So I only need to watch the partition sizes in order to take full advantage of the available storage space, such as creating at least 4 partitions of 512 Mbytes with a 2 GB drive?
Is there a limit to how many partitions I can have?"

I wasn't aware that there were IDE interfaces available for those cards. About the speed: will this be noticeable on an Atari STe (or Mega STe) and cause a lot of frustration and problems?
Or are you just referring to today's PCs and Macs?"

Uwe replies:

"14 [maximum partitions] with TOS, but with HDDRIVER you can also use A: and B: for your hard disk drive, which results in 16 partitions.

Actually the CF cards have an interface that is not much different from an IDE port.

With an ST/STe there is probably no great difference between a hard disk drive and a CF card. If I remember correctly with my Falcon the data transfer rate when reading from a CF card was about 1 MB/s. Writing is slower, though. But definitely silent."

Hallvard asks:

"Regarding SCSI compactflash.... is this something that can be used?: <http://www.adtron.com/products/S35fa.html> (Adtron S35FA Flashpak Flash Disk).

I have no idea about the cost for something like this, but I'll keep searching."

Henk Robbers tells Hallvard:

"Well, If you do a simple google "scsi card reader" it appears that there are more manufacturers. Majority is indeed digital photo realm.

I did some googling and found out that KODAK produces a CF SCSI-2 card reader for digital photo systems. It is specifically stated that it implements the ADTRON hardware."

Well folks, that's it for this week. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - Gearing Up For US PSP Launch!  
    " " " " " " " " " " " " " " Nintendo DS Hits Europe!  
                                PSP Is Slick!  
                                And more!
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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News    -   The Latest Gaming News!
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Sony Gears Up for U.S. PlayStation Portable Launch

There is no doubt that Sony Corp. will have a hit on its hands in the PlayStation Portable video game and media player which launches next week - and there is no doubt the industry needs it.

Demand is so high for the PSP in the United States that the unit has become virtually unavailable in Japan and Sony has postponed the European launch by months to boost U.S. supply. The paperback-book sized unit launches March 24 in North America.

"It's all about how many of these devices Sony can actually crank out," said Mark Argento, a games analyst at ThinkEquity Partners.

Sony is counting on the PSP for much more than its gaming capabilities. In addition to games, the PSP plays movies and digital music files and also acts as a photo viewer. It could be Sony's best chance yet to challenge the ever-increasing dominance of Apple Computer Inc.'s iPod digital music players.

"There have been so many developers, especially in Japan, that view the PSP as a lifestyle device," said Ricardo Torres, a senior editor at leading video gaming Web site GameSpot.com.

"I don't necessarily think it's going to destroy the iPod, but there's no reason why it wouldn't be one of the devices you bring with it now."

Foremost, though, the PSP is for video games, and its release could not have come at a better time for the \$10 billion U.S. video game industry.

Handheld games - for the PSP as well as Nintendo Co. Ltd.'s Game Boy Advance SP and DS - are expected to be the primary driver of U.S. software sales this year. Analysts expect sales to be flat to up 5 percent.

The impending release of the PSP has helped cheer video game stocks. For the year to date, shares in THQ Inc. are up 26 percent, Take-Two Interactive Software Inc. shares are up 17 percent, Activision Inc. shares are up 15 percent and Electronic Arts Inc. shares are up 8 percent. In comparison, the Nasdaq is down 7 percent.

"The bigger question is if (Sony) can get 4-5 million of these units in North America by the end of this year; assuming an attach ratio of two to three games ... to the publishers you're looking at \$400-600 million in revenue," Argento said, assuming a wholesale price of about \$30 for the games.

The \$250 "Value Pack" that goes on sale in the U.S. next week includes the PSP, accessories and the movie "Spider-Man 2" on UMD. That new format, with the capacity of three CDs, was developed especially for the PSP.

In January, Sony said it had no plans for UMD movies in the months after the PSP launch. But it changed track just a month later, as Sony Pictures announced a full slate of films for the tiny new discs.

Both Walt Disney Co. and Lions Gate Entertainment Corp. have committed to UMD releases.

There is so much anticipation for the PSP that some people are willing to pay importers more than \$100 above the planned U.S. list price to get a Japanese unit.

"In the past few weeks, import PSP sales have been leveling off, but not by as much as we had expected this close to the USA release date," said Peter Mui, owner of video game importer National Console Support, in an e-mail interview.

Since 1989, Nintendo has controlled the handheld video game market with its Game Boy line. The more expensive DS, released last year, has two screens, one of which is touch sensitive, and has been cited as a model of creativity.

But it lacks many of the PSP's media functions, and Nintendo executives are not taking Sony lightly.

"We are not dismissing this in any way, shape or form," said Reggie Fils-Amie, Nintendo of America's executive vice president of sales and marketing, said in a recent interview. He suggested consumers would prefer the DS because at \$150 it is more affordable than the PSP and is Game Boy compatible.

But the industry says the two machines are in different leagues.

"I don't think you should discount Nintendo, but I definitely think any kind of head to head comparison between the two machines is not even worth doing," Torres said.

PlayStation Portable Is Slick

Handheld video game machines have finally grown up with the PlayStation Portable from Sony Corp.

That's no slight to Nintendo Co., long a purveyor of kid-friendly Game Boys and, more recently, a cleverly interactive and affordable dual-screen model.

The PSP, however, has the edge with its versatility, raw power and chiseled

good looks.

Like some diminutive monolith from "2001: A Space Odyssey," the PSP looks as if formed from a single black slab of plastic. And if the sleek design doesn't grab you, wait until you turn it on and see the sharp 4.3-inch liquid crystal screen.

The \$250 PSP Value Pack, which goes on sale in North America on March 24, includes the PSP, stereo headphones, a 32-megabyte Memory Stick Duo, battery and charger, a wrist strap and soft carrying case.

Included are two of Sony's proprietary 1.8-gigabyte Universal Media Discs. One is a sampler of music, movies and video games. The other is the movie "Spider-Man 2." The UMDs, about the size of a silver dollar, were a snap to load into the 10-ounce device.

About 24 games, each in the \$40 price range, should be available when the PSP launches. UMD movies are expected to cost about as much as DVD movies, though you won't be able to drop a UMD into a DVD player, as the two formats are incompatible.

With a 16:9 aspect ratio (meaning it looks like a movie screen) and a resolution of 480 by 272 pixels, the PSP's crisp, bright graphics are spectacular. Watching "Spider-Man 2," I felt as if I was holding some artifact from the future, amazed I was able to enjoy a feature film on such a small screen without squinting.

Glare was a problem, especially outdoors. Get used to seeing your face on the screen.

There's a cleaning cloth included, and good thing: the glossy black exterior is easily smudged marring the otherwise gorgeous appearance. On such a pristine surface, even tiny bits of dust and grease really stand out.

The PSP has been described as a PlayStation 2 console that fits in your hands, and for the most part it's true. But you can't play PS2 games on the PSP, and vice versa.

It may be the most expensive portable games system available, costing \$100 more than the dual-screen Nintendo DS, but it's also by far the most powerful. I played two games from Sony's 989 Sports division, "Gretzky NHL" and "World Tour Soccer." Indeed, they looked almost but not quite as good as similar games I've seen on the PS2.

The buttons will be familiar to anyone who's used a standard PS2 controller. It's a good, clean layout that's easy to hold and use even after several hours. Music and picture viewing options are listed in the easy-to-navigate menu system, but they're definitely not a priority.

Sony doesn't supply the required USB cable to transfer pictures or songs from your computer, nor is there any included software to organize such files. I had to drag and drop individual files, a tedious process. And it didn't take long to fill up the measly 32 megabytes. Saved games also are stored on the memory cards, further pinching their capacity.

To avoid swapping cards or losing them, I bought a more spacious 512-MB card on the Internet for \$90.

It was an easy, nearly automatic process to connect to a local Wi-Fi

hotspot, which will enable gamers to soon challenge each other across time zones. You can also play against as many as 15 other nearby PSPs on an ad hoc wireless network.

The replaceable lithium-ion battery took over two hours to fully charge. I watched "Spider-Man 2," about an hour and a half long, with the screen brightness and stereo sound maxed.

That drained about half the battery, giving me a few extra hours to play games before I had to recharge.

Sony predicts the battery will last between three and six hours, depending on use. Movies and games are especially power-hungry because they draw information from the spinning UMDs.

The PSP itself is a bit too large to fit in a pants or shirt pocket, and besides, mine already are stuffed with a cell phone, keys and wallet. For true gaming on the go, the PSP's size may be an issue unless you regularly carry a purse or a backpack.

What I really liked about the PSP is that the screen is big enough, and it has the processing power, to deliver not only casual games but deep, engrossing titles with a level of audiovisual fidelity once reserved for consoles and home computers.

It's easy to lose yourself in a PSP game.

I've used many hybrid game handhelds that failed because they tried to do too much: Nokia's NGage was also a cell phone but didn't function particularly well; the Palm OS-powered Zodiac from Tapwave, Inc., meanwhile, married the functionality of a PDA with a game player but suffered from a poor games selection and never really caught on with consumers.

After years of stumbling in a consumer electronics industry it pioneered, Sony may be a bit premature in declaring the PSP a "21st Century Walkman."

But for games, it's an attractive, uncompromising system that successfully takes the true power of video games out of the living room and into your hands.

Sony Delays European PlayStation Portable Launch

Sony is delaying the European launch of its hotly anticipated PlayStation Portable gaming device by several months to ensure it can supply enough units for its U.S. launch.

The PSP, a sleek multimedia gadget that Sony hopes will be its first big success in consumer electronics since the PlayStation 2 five years ago, is already on sale in Japan and will hit U.S. stores on March 24.

Sony's factories have been unable to churn out enough PSPs to launch them simultaneously across the world. The company will wait to see whether it can keep up with demand in the U.S. before setting a date for Europe.

"It's been deferred. We were originally hoping for an end of fiscal year (March 31) launch, but now that's not going to be the case," a Sony spokesman told Reuters Tuesday. "It is likely to be a matter of a few

months rather than a few weeks - it's a matter of allocation." "When it launches in the U.S., they will have 1 million units at launch and continuity of supply thereafter," he added.

The PSP, which Sony hopes will be as big of a hit as Apple's iPod music player, launched in Japan last December and remains in extremely limited supply there after the shipping of about 1.2 million units.

When the PlayStation 2 console was in short supply last Christmas, Sony resorted to the costly option of shipping units to the United States from China via air freight.

Sony games guru Ken Kutaragi, known as the father of the PlayStation, took on a diminished role at the company last week as part of a corporate shake-up that installed U.S. Sony head Howard Stringer as CEO of the entire company.

Nintendo DS Makes Its Euro Debut

Nintendo's DS handheld game console has officially gone on sale in Europe.

Many stores around the UK opened at midnight to let keen gamers get their hands on the device.

The two-screen clamshell gadget costs 99 (149 euros) and 15 games are available for it at launch, some featuring well-known characters such as Super Mario and Rayman.

The DS spearheads Nintendo's attempt to continue its dominance of the handheld gaming market.

Since going on sale in Japan and the US at the end of 2004, Nintendo has sold almost 4m DS consoles.

Part of this popularity may be due to the fact that the DS can run any of the catalogue of 700 games produced for Nintendo's GameBoy Advance handheld.

Games for the DS are expected to cost between 19 and 29. About 130 games for the DS are in development.

As well as having two screens, one of which is controlled by touch, the DS also lets players take on up to 16 other people via wireless.

A "download play" option means DS owners can take each other on even if only one of them owns a copy of a particular game.

Other DS owners can also be sent text messages and drawings. Nintendo is also planning to release a media adapter for the handheld so it can play music and video.

Five Virgin megastores and 150 Game shops were expected to open early on Friday morning to let people buy a DS.

"We know that customers want it as soon as it's released - and that means the minute, not the day," said Robert Quinn, Game's UK sales director.

UK LAUNCH LINE-UP

Super Mario 64 DS
WarioWare Touched!
Pok mon Dash
Polarium
Tiger Woods PGA Tour
The Urbz: Sims in the City
Spider-Man 2
Project Rub
Mr Driller: Drill Spirits
Rayman DS
Asphalt Urban GT
Zoo Keeper
Ping Pals
Robots
Sprung: The Dating Game

But Nintendo will only have sole control of Europe's handheld gaming market for a few weeks because soon Sony is expected to release its PSP console.

Although Nintendo is aiming for younger players and the PSP is more for older gamers, it is likely that the two firms will be competing for many of the same customers.

Sony's PSP represents a real threat to Nintendo because of the huge number of PlayStation owners around the world and the greater flexibility of the sleek black gadget.

The PSP uses small discs for games, can play music and movies without the need for add-ons and also supports short-range wireless play.

When it goes on sale the PSP is likely to cost between 130 and 200.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Judge: Apple Has Right To Subpoena Bloggers

Apple Computer will be allowed to subpoena the names of sources who provided three blogs devoted to Apple - PowerPage, Apple Insider and Think Secret - with proprietary company information, according to a California judge's ruling.

Late last year, the the three Web sites published rumors of an impending new product from Apple called "Asteroid."

According to Judge James P. Kleinberg, Apple's interest in protecting trade secrets outweighs the bloggers' right to disseminate that information. The judge did not directly address the larger issue stemming from the dispute,

however - that is, whether bloggers are protected by the same laws as professional journalists.

Advocates for the Web sites were dismayed by the ruling. "Journalists of all stripes rely upon the ability to protect sources ... to acquire information and communicate it to the public," said the Electronic Frontier Foundation in response to the ruling.

The judge pointed out that even journalists do not have a license "to violate valid criminal laws." He said that "the right to keep and maintain proprietary information, as such, is a right which the California Legislature and courts have long affirmed and which is essential to the future of technology and innovation."

Whether the Web-page publishers fit the definition of "journalist, reporter, blogger or anything else need not be decided at this juncture," he said.

Although the majority of Americans are unfamiliar with blogs - basically, online personal journals about nearly any subject - they have grown in prominence, especially during the last presidential election.

According to a recent study by the Pew Internet & American Life Project, blog readership rose by 58 percent in 2004, to 27 percent of Internet users, from the 17 percent who said they were blog readers in a survey done last February.

"Many of the top blog sites are created by a sophisticated community focusing on analysis of politics, economics and business," Pew Internet & American Life Project Director Lee Rainie told NewsFactor. "The people producing and reading these blogs often are members of the media, such as newspaper columnists or industry analysts."

EFF, which filed a brief on the case, has one week to file an appeal with the California Court of Appeals. If the appellate court decides in favor of Apple, EFF will try to have the state supreme court hear the case, it has said.

EU Official Still Undecided on Microsoft

European Union antitrust chief Neelie Kroes said Tuesday her office was still determining whether Microsoft Corp. was complying with last year's landmark EU ruling against it.

The ruling requires the company to offer an alternative Windows version for sale without its video and music Media Player application. Microsoft also has to make technical information available to allow rivals to improve the interoperability of their products with the Windows server.

The EU said last week it had completed market-testing various names for a version of Microsoft Corp.'s Windows without Media Player software. It also is looking into Microsoft's licensing plans for technical information.

Kroes told the European Parliament's Economic and Monetary Affairs Committee it was premature to say whether Microsoft's moves were sufficient.

EU antitrust regulators fined Microsoft a record 497 million euros (\$654 million) when they ruled in March that Microsoft abusively wielded its Windows software monopoly and locked competitors out of the market.

Microsoft insists it was in the process of complying with the EU ruling.

EU Threatens Microsoft With New Fines

The European Union threatened Microsoft Corp. on Friday with new fines if the software company doesn't make it easier and cheaper for competitors to see the blueprints of its server software.

After hearing from Microsoft's rivals, the EU's antitrust office determined that the system created by Microsoft for granting competitors access to Windows server source code was unsatisfactory.

"Based on the market tests, it doesn't seem to be working at all," said Jonathan Todd, the spokesman for the EU's antitrust office.

EU antitrust regulators fined Microsoft a record 497 million euros (\$665 million) when they ruled a year ago that Microsoft abusively wielded its Windows software monopoly to lock competitors out of the market.

They ordered, among other things, that Microsoft share Windows server code with rivals so their products can better communicate on networks with machines that run Windows operating systems.

Microsoft decided it would provide the information through licenses, which Todd said the European Commission felt were too expensive.

He said competitors were also having difficulty getting access to the information required to decide whether to buy a license, with Microsoft forcing everyone to buy a full license package.

Furthermore, Todd said vendors providing open-source products such as Linux were excluded from the process.

To date, no company has actually requested a license, said Microsoft spokesman Jim Desler. He added that the EU has not told Microsoft it can't charge for the licenses. Microsoft had proposed charging a royalty fee of between \$100 and \$600 per server.

Todd said the EU could impose prohibitive fines of up to 5 percent of the company's daily global sales if it refuses to better cooperate.

"The Commission remains patient but there are limits to the patience we are prepared to show," Todd said. "The ball is now in Microsoft's court and I am sure they will come back to us shortly on these issues."

Analyst Matt Rosoff with independent researchers Directions on Microsoft said it isn't surprising that there is some back-and-forth between the software behemoth and European regulators over the terms of compliance. But he said a disagreement over whether Microsoft should make the code available to open-source providers could prove to be a major sticking point, since Microsoft is steadfastly against the concept of software that is freely shared.

Still, Rosoff said ultimately Microsoft may have to comply with regulators' demands.

"The EC has the power to impose a pretty big fine, and I do think that Microsoft would not like to pay that fine," Rosoff said. "Certainly shareholders would not like to see Microsoft paying that fine."

The year-old EU ruling also forces the company to offer an alternative Windows version for sale without its Windows Media Player software. Friday's criticism did not address that issue.

Microsoft said that version has reached manufacturers but will not be shipped to computer shops until it resolves a dispute with the EU over the product's name. The EU rejected Microsoft's first choice: "Windows XP Reduced Media Edition," deciding that it would discourage sales.

The EU's ruling against Microsoft went much further than the company's 2002 settlement of similar charges with the U.S. Justice Department, which required only that users be allowed to hide Media Player and set another as the default.

Hacker Whose E-Mail Called Police Goes to Jail

A Louisiana man who wrote malicious e-mails that caused some computers to dial the 911 emergency number was sentenced on Monday to six months in prison.

A U.S. federal judge sentenced David Jeansonne, 44, to the prison term as well as six months home detention after he admitted sending e-mails to about 20 subscribers of Microsoft's WebTV, a television Internet service since renamed MSN TV.

Code embedded in the e-mail changed the subscriber's WebTV number to dial 911 rather than WebTV. Police dispatched officers on at least 10 occasions because of the 2002 hoax, officials said.

Jeansonne pleaded guilty last month to two counts of intentionally damaging computers and causing a public safety threat.

FTC Goes After 'Phony' Spyware Assassin

The Federal Trade Commission has asked a U.S. District Court to bar Spyware Assassin and its affiliates from offering consumers free spyware detection scans and from selling antispware software.

The FTC also is seeking a permanent halt to the alleged "marketing scam," as well as redress for consumers.

"The defendants' free remote scan is phony, and the defendants' representations that they have detected spyware on the consumer's computer are deceptive," the FTC charges.

In papers filed with the court, the FTC alleges that Spyware Assassin and its affiliates use Web sites, e-mail, banner ads and pop-ups to draw users

to the company's site.

After dire warnings about spyware, users are offered a free scanning tool, which inevitably finds "dangerous spyware virus infections," according to the company's post-scan pop-up message.

The message advises users to pay for and download Spyware Assassin software, which does not remove all, or substantially all, spyware, the FTC alleges. This violates the FTC Act, which bars deceptive claims.

As the FTC was conducting its investigation, security firms also were noticing the rise in Spyware Assassin's antispware e-mail activity.

Reston, Virginia-based iDefense, a threat-intelligence firm, noticed the fraudulent e-mails increasing over the past couple of months.

"There's been a dramatic increase in the number of messages from Spyware Assassin," said iDefense director of malicious code research Ken Dunham. "We checked it out and found they were bogus."

Unlike prescription drug scams, antispware protection appeals to a larger group of people, Dunham noted, because many users have heard of spyware, but most are unaware of how to remove it.

Although Spyware Assassin could be shut down permanently, that does not solve the deeper issue of user naivete, according to Dunham.

"The larger problem that this highlights is that users are far too trusting [of] junk e-mail and spam," he said. "There is an issue here much bigger than this one fraudulent site, and that's user education," Dunham added.

Without reliable information being disseminated to users about what is safe and what is fraud, bogus e-mail claims are likely to proliferate, noted Dunham.

EBay Violated Small Firm's Patent

In a decision that could force eBay Inc. to alter some of its auctions, a federal appeals court ruled Wednesday that the e-commerce powerhouse infringed on a patent owned by a small Virginia business.

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit said eBay's fixed-price auctions and some of its online payment methods violate a patent obtained by Great Falls, Va.-based MercExchange Inc., which sued eBay in September 2001.

A lower court jury in Virginia ruled in May 2003 that eBay infringed on two MercExchange patents, and a judge ordered the company to pay MercExchange president Thomas Woolston \$29.5 million in lost licensing fees and damages.

The Washington, D.C., appeals court agreed Wednesday that eBay infringed on the patent involving no-haggle sales but invalidated a second MercExchange patent involving an online comparison shopping tool that Woolston said was worth \$4.5 million.

As a result, the ruling could force eBay to pay \$25 million in damages.

Woolston's attorneys said they'd ask for an injunction within several weeks that requires eBay to pay Woolston for use of the patent or stop using online sales techniques that infringe on it. Many patent experts had expected San Jose-based eBay to prevail.

Woolston, who is working closely with Chicago-based auction company UBid.com, hailed the ruling as a major victory for inventors and small business owners.

"We're trying to build a better, faster eBay, and this could make it easier for us to compete against the company that has 95 percent of the market," he said.

MercExchange had 40 workers when Woolston sued in September 2001. It has since shrunk to three employees. eBay is predicting 2005 sales between \$4.25 billion and \$4.35 billion.

eBay said in a statement that it was "pleased" that the comparison shopping tool patent was invalidated and said the infringement ruling wouldn't hurt earnings.

"Looking forward, we believe that any injunction that might be issued by the district court with respect to the other patent will not have an impact on our business because of changes we have made following the district court's original verdict," eBay stated. "We are confident in our position against MercExchange."

Investors have largely disregarded the case because it does not involve eBay's tremendously popular auctions and is not expected to affect the millions of competing bids that eBay processes each day.

Nor is it expected to significantly impact PayPal, a bill payment division that has generated hundreds of millions of dollars for eBay.

Instead, the case hinges on the way eBay sells fixed-price merchandise, which accounts for roughly 35 percent of eBay's total sales. Some analysts say the case may end up affecting as little as 5 percent of eBay's sales.

If the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia grants the injunction, eBay may have to add extra steps to eBay's no-bid sales, including the "Buy It Now" feature. The feature offers a single price - typically far above the opening bid - so people who dislike haggling can simply click and buy.

The case mirrors another lawsuit by Seattle-based Amazon.com, which sued online bookstore rival Barnesandnoble.com in 1999. Amazon.com alleged that Barnesandnoble.com had illegally copied its patented "1-Click" system, which theoretically allows pre-registered customers to purchase items with only one click of the mouse.

The two companies settled out of court in 2002 and would not disclose the terms.

Scott Robertson, an attorney in Washington, D.C., with Hunton & Williams LLP, which is representing MercExchange, said the \$25 million in damages covers licensing through May 2003.

Woolston may seek as much as \$100 million in additional damages for subsequent infringements, he said.

"EBay always claimed they didn't infringe, and now we know it wasn't true," Robertson said. "They thought Tom's small company couldn't stand up against them."

IT Pros Say Desktop Anti-Spyware Not Up to Snuff

Desktop anti-spyware software isn't doing the job, IT professionals have concluded.

According to an international survey by proxy appliance company Blue Coat Systems, 72 percent said desktop anti-spyware programs were ineffective in protecting their networks. Blue Coat surveyed 339 IT staffers who used programs from Computer Associates International (PestPatrol), Kaspersky Lab, Lavasoft (Ad-Aware), McAfee, Microsoft, Spybot, Symantec, or Webroot Software.

Eighty-four percent of respondents, from large, medium-size, and small organizations, reported their spyware problems were the same as or worse than three months ago, Blue Coat said.

Techworld found this conflicted with findings for home broadband users in the U.S. whom the National Cyber Security Alliance, an industry body, said saw a reduction in infection from 91 percent in February 2004 to 80 percent in October.

Steve Mullaney, vice president of marketing for California-based Blue Coat, said: "While desktop software is the only answer for consumers, enterprises are likely to see their costs spiral unless they implement a 'defense-in-depth' strategy that includes a gateway anti-spyware solution."

Paul Wood, chief information analyst at e-mail security company Message Labs, said that because spyware was a gray area - encompassing legitimate employer control programs and approved data harvesting as well as Trojan-type material and other malware - it needed expert management.

"It's not like buying a washing machine or fridge-freezer, it's something you have to manage and look after.

Blue Coat's approach is to provide dedicated appliances on the edge of the company network to filter traffic. Message Labs offers an outsourced managed service.

Wood said IT managers had enough on their plates dealing with frequent Windows security upgrades to thousands of computers, for example, without having to be experts on the latest criminal IT threat from anywhere in the world--hour by hour, day by day.

"We believe desktop software is certainly not as effective as you would expect in this area," he said. "It's a gray area, as well as spam and software for conducting phishing scams, you also get spyware as a legitimate part of applications, for example, music file sharing. It's free but in return the end user license agreement may allow them to use information about your Internet activities for marketing."

Wood said some parental control programs allowed keylogging. "Desktop software has problems, especially when dealing with legitimate applications. Desktop software programs err on the side of caution."

The other major problem for IT managers relying on a desktop software approach, Wood said, was a lack of speed in response to new threats.

No matter how good the software, there was always an average 10-hour gap between a new threat breaking out and a sample being taken by the software companies through which their products could identify and block the new problem, he said.

"There is a window of vulnerability; it can spread quite considerably. The bad guys are sending out much more quickly and get a certain number out. Safety depends on your specific anti-spyware software identifying something as spyware.

Managed services, like that from Message Labs, route customers' e-mail through central servers. The company has a global operation, which Wood said allowed it to respond to new threats faster.

"Normally, if something happens on the other side of the world, you're not going to know about it until it affects you."

He added that unless security is an IT manager's expert subject it's hard to ascertain the level of risk from each threat and therefore to prioritize. "IT managers are trying to deal with more regulations all the time - corporate governance and so on. As e-mail gets bigger it becomes more of a burden; you have to look at scaling up.

"People are now realizing that desktop software isn't that effective against this stuff," he said.

Microsoft Internet Explorer 7.0 Details Begin to Leak

Since it first revealed a month ago that it was pulling a U-turn by releasing a new version of Internet Explorer independent of Longhorn, Microsoft has been unwilling to share many particulars about its forthcoming browser.

Will Internet Explorer (IE) 7.0 have tabs? Will it comply with the Cascading Style Sheet (CSS) 2.0 standard? Exactly how will it make browsing more secure? Will it ship in 2005?

Microsoft's answers? No comment.

Microsoft has shared publicly that IE 7.0 will be focused primarily on improving security. Company officials said recently that Microsoft plans to make IE 7.0 available to Windows XP Service Pack 2, Windows Server 2003 Service Pack 1 and Windows XP Professional x64 users. A first beta of IE 7.0 is due out this summer.

But Microsoft is sharing quite a bit more IE 7.0 specifics privately with key partners, sources who requested anonymity claim.

Sources say that IE 7.0 - which is code-named "Rincon," they hear - will be a tabbed browser.

IE 7.0 will feature international domain name (IDN) support; transparent Portable Network Graphics (PNG) support, which will allow for the display

of overlayed images in the browser; and new functionality that will simplify printing from inside IE 7.0, partner sources said. The new browser also will likely include a built-in news aggregator.

(Coincidentally, or perhaps not, MSN just began testing a new Microsoft-developed RSS aggregator.)

Among the myriad security enhancements Microsoft is expecting to include in IE 7.0, according to partner sources:

reduced privilege mode becomes the default; no cross-domain scripting and/or scripting access; improved Secure Sockets Layer (SSL) user interface; possible integration between IE 7.0 and Microsoft's Windows anti-spyware service, which currently is in beta.

Partner sources say Microsoft is wavering on the extent to which it plans to support CSS2 with IE 7.0. Developers have been clamoring for Microsoft to update its CSS support to support the latest W3C standards for years. But Microsoft is leaning toward adding some additional CSS2 support to IE 7.0, but not embracing the standard in its entirety, partners say.

Parents Filtering Teens' Web Surfing

American parents are increasingly taking advantage of Internet filters to thwart access to objectionable online material by their children, according to research conducted by the Pew Internet & American Life Project (PIP).

More than half (54 percent) of U.S. families with teenagers use such filters, representing a 65 percent hike from 2000.

In all, some 19 million youths live in homes with Internet connections and the number of children living in homes with filters has grown to 12 million today from 7 million in 2000.

"We are seeing parents turn to filters as a technological solution that complements other protection measures such as restricting access to the Internet and monitoring teens' Web surfing activities," says Pew research specialist Amanda Lenhart.

She said that the recent poll results suggest parents might be overwhelmed by the amount of content, both acceptable and objectionable, available online, and see filters as a way to protect their children when they are not able to keep tabs on Web surfing.

As might be expected, parents who are frequent Internet users and who have middle-school-age children are more likely to deploy filters than those with older children and who are less tech-savvy, said Lenhart.

"What's interesting is that there is agreement among parents and their teens that teens are not as careful as they should be online, and that teens do things online their parents don't know about," she said.

The ongoing struggle between parents who want to protect their children and teens who want to assert their independence is playing out in new ways online, she added.

Besides technology, several other measures are used by parents to monitor

online activity by their children, the report reveals. An estimated 73 percent of families locate their computers in an open location inside the home, and 64 percent of parents say they establish rules about their teens' time online.

The findings also come at a time when a federal court is preparing to consider a lawsuit against the federal Child Online Protection Act (COPA), which was passed in 1998.

The legislation requires Web sites containing "material harmful to minors" to use an age verification system - such as asking for credit card information - to ensure that site visitors are age 18 or older.

The American Civil Liberties Union and other civil rights groups sued the government, arguing that COPA is an unconstitutional infringement on the free speech and privacy rights of adults.

"Filters are attractive to parents because they can be customized to sift out sites that some individuals find objectionable but others may not have a problem with. Parents can impose their own values through the use of this technology," Lenhart said.

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